Chris Bender

EDC 102

The high school I have chosen for my context statement is the Exeter – West Greenwich high school which is a 9-12 grade high school. I graduated high school in 1991, this was the same year that book Savage Inequalities was published by Jonathan Kozol. My high school was Dover high school in Dover Delaware. My high school career was actually broken between two different schools. Ninth and tenth grades were attended at Kadena High School in Okinawa Japan. Eleven and twelfth grades were at Dover high.

There were some serious differences between my two high schools. Kadena high school was a Department of Defense (DOD) school and fell under a different funding bracket, different standards, and a whole different demographic in its students. Our student body was made up of children of military service members stationed on the island of Okinawa. That leveled the playing field in that all children came from modern and adequate homes, steady pay checks, nutrition both at school and home, and an equality as far as what our parents did for work. The only separation was really paygrade of our military parents. We all also had one common bond we tried not to talk about but every so often it reared its head when a parent’s life was lost on a mission or work event. That’s when we were all reminded that our parents did very dangerous stuff and they could be taken at any time. Again, the field was equal.

When I transferred to Dover high school, I remember the day I checked in clearly. Up to then I had only been to DOD schools or an equivalent. They are modern or “nice” if you will. It was summertime when we went in to pick my classes and tour the school so it was empty except essential staff. I remember having to use the bathroom and asked the counsellor to go. As I walked to the bathroom, I began to notice the beaten walls and dented lockers. They had fresh paint but they were obviously well used. I got to the bathroom and noticed that although it was lit, it seemed dark and had no stall doors. The wall between stalls was only chest high. It didn’t take long after my first couple weeks of school to begin noticing the change in demographics. We didn’t have a lot I common like at DOD schools, in fact, the differences were extreme. The various cliques had a lot in common but that was about it.

As time went on, I began to see for the first time in my life how prevalent racism was within the population. Growing up in the military we all are exposed to various cultures, skin colors, and religions of every mix you could think of and it means nothing to us, we treated everyone the same. This was not so in the public sector. I had grown my hair out and fell into the head banging group or “clique” which pretty much was shunned by the “preps” but got along with everyone else. As much of a shock as this all was, it is nothing compared to what is documented in *SI*. We did have a representation from rich well to do homes to students coming from poor black homes and students from the farms outside Dover. An amusing memory when compared to modern schools is I remember guys coming to school from the fields not working but deer hunting. Many families then relied on everyone in the family getting deer to provide meat for the year. Yes, there were firearms on school property in cars and no one thought anything of it. How things have changed.

Looking back, I don’t see where any of our teachers made any changes in teaching based on racism or poverty like in *Savage,* that seemed to be more students but it was obvious, they brought it from home. The teachers were fair all around, you either did your work or didn’t. You passed or didn’t. I also think a difference is then it was our fault if we didn’t do our work, not our teachers or parents. Our community was also in a much better place than those in *Savage*. Although we had some students from poor homes, it was not near as poor as the people in East St Louis.